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Value of Values

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Values are right for an individual, but this "rightness" must be balanced with the values of an organisation, society and the world at large. It is living the spirit by giving "Life" to the lifeless pigments of letters in value statements hung on corporate walls, says M R CHANDRAMOWLY.

DHANESH, a successful businessman, sent his lad Suman on a long journey to learn about the secret of success and happiness from the wisest man in the world. Suman wandered through different places for many days and weeks in search of the wisest man. Finally, he was guided to proceed towards a beautiful castle, high atop a mountain by some people. It was there, the wisest man lived. Rather than finding a saintly man, Suman, on entering the main room of the castle, saw a hive of activity: diamond merchants and other tradesmen came and went, people were conversing in the corners, and there was group of musicians playing instrumental music. Jnanendra, the wisest man was conversing with people and Suman waited for two hours before it was his turn to be given attention. Suman came, touched the feet of Jnanendra, and explained him why he had come. Jnanendra patiently listened to Suman and told him that he will talk to him later about the secret of success and happiness. He suggested Suman to look around the palace and return in two hours.

"Meanwhile, I want to ask you to do some thing," said the wise man, handing Suman a spoon that held two drops oil. "As you wander around, carry this spoon with you without allowing the oil to spill". Suman began climbing and descending the many stairways of the palace, keeping his eyes fixed on the spoon. After two hours, he returned to the room where the wise man was.

"Well", asked Jnanendra, "did you see the gold studded wall-hangings in the durbar hall? Did you see the royal garden that it took the master gardener ten years to create? Did you visit the nine jewelled royal temple?" Suman was embarrassed, and confessed that he had observed nothing. His only concern had been not to spill the oil that Jnanendra had entrusted to him. "Then go back and observe the marvels of this palace," said the wise man. "You cannot trust a man if you don't know his house." Relieved, Suman picked up the spoon and returned to his exploration of the palace. This time observing all the royal glories of the palace, he returned to Jnanendra and appreciated in detail everything he had seen. "But where are the drops of oil. I entrusted to you," asked Jnanendra. Looking down at the spoon held, Suman saw the oil was gone. "Well, there is only one piece of advice I can give you," said the wisest of wise men. "The secret of success and happiness is to see

all the marvels of the world, and never to forget the drops of oil on the spoon." (Adapted from a quoted story in the book 'The Alchemist' by Paulo Coelho).

Suman understood the meaning of the two oil drops, the Vision and Values, which must never be forgotten while he ventured in many facets of life to build successful businesses. Vision is the mental picture of our desired future and values are our emotions based on which we chose and decide things and how we accomplish them. Managing values is the ability to commit to a way of interacting with all stakeholders and others reflecting the common purpose to become ethical, responsive and profitable.

Origin of Human Values

During the earliest days of human life, mankind was spread over the globe driven by a centrifugal force of existence coping up with climate and environment variations. Thus emerged the diversity of cultures. Many of these wide spread different cultures disappeared and few of them survived. One of the main concerns of the mobile mankind is problem-solving organism. In a particular environment, spoken languages developed and then much later when civilisation reached matured state, different forms of written languages improved our ability to communicate and interchange ideas.

There came the need for mutually acceptable forms of behaviour for individuals to survive and reproduce. Such acceptable behaviours developed and transmitted from one generation to next. In the primitive stage, such "values" were mostly biological. For many millennia the values existed that suited the tribe. About ten thousand years ago came the earliest civilisations evolving the real knowledge moving further from lower biological to higher purpose of universe and conscious of life on earth. Each religion produced certain myths around the three fundamental questions of man, The Life, The world and The Creator. This led to some absolute rules of conduct, which is the basis for "human values".

Our personal values determine how we assess our needs and choices and how we interact with others' perceived values and needs to determine our action. The values, which are caught, rather than taught, are unique for each of us. Values are part of our "becoming". Its uniqueness is evolved by quality of nature and nurture we receive. What "values" we seek to develop depends on our struggle with the environment.

Defining Values

Social scientists have attempted to understand human values and behaviours while the behavioural inconsistency with values is ongoing that the elders' advice is always "Do as I say and not as I do". At an individual level, value is a hidden belief about life and world around. Looking at what Reokech (1973), Hechter (1993), Merton (1968) and others say about it, value can be described as being terminal, representing desirable end states or instrumental to accomplish a goal. The most important thing in life is to decide what is most important says -Ken Blanchard - Managing by Values. Values are our inner feelings underpinning our choices and decisions and the means to achieve them.

Individual Values

Human mind is a set of complex processes, not well understood, by means of which the human organism attends to and manages the affairs of a complex life. While we all principally agree about human values, regardless of country, culture or creed, values may vary in its relative importance of priority from one person to another. Human values include the motives and ideals that govern our personal, professional, and spiritual life as well as issues of the society where we live in. We do not ordinarily base decisions on mental representations of the world. We think rather in terms of objectives within the systems we perceive the world to be, and of responding in the light of our values, to feedback related to our activity (Powers, 1973). Most of what happens is quite outside of human awareness. We may be aware of hazardous road conditions but not aware of all the factors, which cause these, and a full grasp of all relevant factors is beyond human capacities. The physicist David Bohm describes an “implicate order”, or “holographic paradigm”, in which the parts of the world, as well as of the brain and mind, are seen as reflecting the larger aspects of the whole which contains them. (Bohm, 1987).

Values and preferences

Since “values” are our feelings and emotions connected to our motive, the priorities also change from circumstances. However, it is possible for us to identify our core values and their priorities as of now. Each person’s “values” are “right” for him/her but this individual “rightness” must be balanced with the “values” of an organisation, society and the world at large. These are absolutes, which must be maintained to hold good for all humanity perpetually in all most all situations. While “good” is to be preferred to “bad”, “benevolence” to “malevolence” and “right” to “wrong”, but just what these terms mean for each of us is decided by our own personal 'values'.

I thought it is important to understand the mind of the younger generation in terms of the value directions and preferences. In a coaching session on values, the participants (graduates and PGs) were asked to review the list of about 70 human values, which I extracted from eastern and western wisdom. I told them to check the top 10 values that are most important to them. When they did that with ease they were asked to narrow down to five and finally cross of two for a remainder of three. The values generally preferred were independence, relationships, excellence, achievement, status, friendship, quality, friendship, truth, wealth, pleasure, positive attitude, creativity, loyalty, among many others. Once these individual values are identified, it is essential to connect these values of respective organisations they work for to balance personal and profession life.

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